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You Don't Have to Share, but You Do Have to Take Turns

Two phrases that Little School teachers do not use are: "You have to share," and "Say you're sorry." "Share" and "sorry" are words that do not mean the same thing to children as they do to adults.

To most young children, "You have to share," translates neatly into, "You have to give me that right now because I want it." An apology may serve as a handy way to avoid responsibility for your actions ("I *said* I was sorry!"); or, forcing a child to apologize may change the focus from the child's inappropriate behavior to her anger at being told what to do.

At school the child who just can't manage sharing may not have to. "Molly needs to use that puzzle by herself right now. When she's finished you may have a turn." Sometimes we encourage the children to share: "I bet two children could look at that book together." But, because "share" is such a loaded word for children, we steer clear of it. When we teach children to take turns, we are helping them to negotiate and to compromise. The children can set a timer to ring when a turn is over; and children can learn to take turns once they recognize that teachers are fair, that classroom rules support everyone.

We are pleased to hear heartfelt apologies, spontaneously offered. Many children who hurt a classmate by mistake instantly apologize and everyone feels better. But too often the apology is a hasty, rote offering that is meant to get the offender off the hook. Sometimes children demand an apology from another child as a way of getting even. The very values we are trying to teach are being distorted.

If a child knocks down another child's building, we ask that he help rebuild it. If a child hurts another child, we ask that she get the tissue or the bandaid. This helps the child to begin to understand the discomfort of the other child and is a logical consequence of the child's actions.

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Parents, caregivers and teachers share goals for children. We want to help children get along with each other, develop social skills. However, we may at times go about teaching these things differently. Don't be surprised if you hear your children come home from school saying, "We don't have to share and we don't have to say we're sorry," but rest assured that the children do indeed have to learn how to compromise, how to take turns and how to take responsibility for their actions.

We make every effort to model respect and kindness for the children. One of our goals is to help children recognize their own needs and get them met and to begin to recognize and respect the needs of others.

Kate